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AUTHOR Volp, Frederick D.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a 1994 followup study of New York state school superintendents. The first survey was conducted in 1992. Questionnaires sent by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) to over 700 superintendents elicited 516 responses, a 68 percent response rate. The questionnaire gathered data on demographics, contractual issues, retirement plans, and perceptions of educational issues. The findings reinforce a conclusion of the 1992 study, which found evidence of a potential "leadership vacuum." Superintendents as a group have aged, 40 percent plan to retire within the next 5 years, and 66 percent intend to retire by the year 2004. The majority are white males. Most respondents reported high levels of satisfaction in their working relationships with school boards. Although nearly one-half wanted to spend time on curriculum/instruction issues, superintendents spent more time involved in school finance, board relations, and personnel issues. They rated the top three local issues as passage of budgets/bond referenda, school finance, and negotiations, and the top three state issues as implementation of the New Compact for Learning, school finance, and special education. Of issues on the reform agenda, they placed most value on teacher, parent, and community involvement. Seven figures and five tables are included. (LMI)

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SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY II

A Study of School Superintendents in New York State: 1994 - 1995

April 1995

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Authors

Frederick D. Volp, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Oneida City School District

Geoffrey H. Davis, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Little Falls City School District

William E. Whitehill, Ed.D., Chair
Membership Committee
District Superintendent
Herkimer County BOCES

Anthony Barretta
Superintendent
Holland Patent Central School

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New York State Council of School Superintendents

James J. O'Connell, Executive Director
Claire E. Brown, Assistant Director, Membership Services
Michael J. Martin - Assistant Director - Legislation

Membership Committee

William E. Whitehill, Chair
District Superintendent
Herkimer BOCES

Anthony Barretta
Superintendent
Holland Patent Central

Glenn Bellinger
Superintendent
Oppenheim-Ephratah CSD

Geoffrey H. Davis
Superintendent
Little Falls City Schools

Elliott Garfinkle
Superintendent
Oceanside Union Free School

Frederick D. Volp
Superintendent
Oneida City School District

SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY II

A Study of School Superintendents in New York State 1994 — 1995

Introduction

This study was authorized by the New York Sate Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) as a follow-up to the original study completed in the spring of 1992. The original study emerged as a priority for the Membership Committee during the Summer Planning Session at the Gideon Putnam, Saratoga Springs, New York, in July 1991. It was determined that it would be useful to conduct a parallel study in 1994 to validate the data from *Snapshot I* and to refine the questionnaire. The Council expects to conduct the study every three years in the future. This continuous process will give NYSCOSS an updated data bank with an historic perspective. Executive Director Dr. James O'Connell and Assistant Director Dr. Claire Brown have been extraordinarily supportive of this research effort.

The original study was well-received by the membership, and a 63% response rate provided reliable data. A number of the questions in the first study, however, proved difficult to interpret. These difficulties were resolved in planning the follow-up study. *Snapshot II* proved to be a success with a 68% return rate. Most questions provided valid data, which are presented in the following analysis.

A subcommittee of the Membership Committee analyzed the data and wrote the report. William E. Whitehill, Jr., Ed.D., District Superintendent, Herkimer County BOCES , served as Chair; Frederick D. Volp, Ph.D., Superintendent, Oneida City Schools, served as lead author; Geoffrey H. Davis, Ed.D., Superintendent, Little Falls City School Districts, and Anthony Barretta, Superintended, Holland Patent Central School, wrote and analyzed specific sections and contributed to the study as a whole. The Regional Information Center at the Madison-Oneida BOCES, with the very able assistance of Katie Duell and Margaret Peck, gave the Subcommittee expertise in tabulating and analyzing the data.

The review of the study and related comments are provided in the following analysis.

Part I: Personal - Geographical Data

The return rate for the *Snapshot II* questionnaire was 68%. This was a 5% increase in return over *Snapshot I*. We believe that this return rate reinforces and strengthens the validity of our data and is a sample of the total membership, not merely a statistical sample. The breakdown of the 516 questionnaires received is reported in Table I.

Table 1
Membership Returns

	Number	% of Total
Superintendents	469	91.0%
Assistant Superintendents	7	1.3%
District Superintendents	30	5.0%
NYC Community Superintendents	4	0.8%
Other	6	1.9%
Total Returns	516	100%

This return is compared to the size and type of school district, the breakdown was again very representative. Table 2 summarizes the types of school districts responding.

Table 2
District Types

Rural	49.3%
Suburban	37.3%
Small City	6.4%
Large City	1.3%
Other	5.6%

The mean age of superintendents responding in 1994 was 51 years old. This is a slight increase from the original study in 1992. It is our belief that many individuals entering the superintendency in the last few years are older, thus skewing the age slightly in the past two years. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the respondents are men and 11% women. There is a slight increase of 3% in the amount of women when compared to 1992. When compared to national statistics our breakdown is comparable to a recent study which showed 90% of the superintendents are male and 10% are female. Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents are married, 5% divorced, and 3% have never married.

The overwhelming proportion of superintendents in our study, 97%, are white, with 2% Black and 1% Hispanic. This ethnic breakdown is comparable to national statistics in which 95% are white, 3% Black, and 2% Hispanic. Forty-three percent (43%) have doctorates and the remainder have Master's degrees, Certificates of Advanced Studies, or both.

A 60% majority of New York superintendents have five or more years of experience. This is significantly different from the national average which is 43%. We believe that this statistic is notable and has an implication for the future of our profession. Within the next five to eight years a significant portion, above the national average, of the superintendents will be retiring.

Consideration was given as to whether superintendents tended to move up from within the district to the superintendency or move in from outside the district. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of those involved in our study accepted the superintendency from the outside, with

27% moving up from within. It was interesting to note that the majority of the sample, 48%, were not required by contract to move into the district. Thirty-three percent (33%) were required to move, with the remainder already living in the district. Of those who were not required to move, 51% did so anyway. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of those who moved received moving expenses. Seventy percent (70%) of that figure received total payment. Seventy-five percent (75%) of those superintendents who moved did so within 150 miles of their previous location.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of the group had children of school age. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the children attended the school district in which their parent served as superintendent.

Part II: Contractual Issues

The chief executive office of a school district in New York State is the Superintendent of Schools, appointed by resolution of the Board of Education, with general duties and responsibilities set forth in Education Law. In nearly all districts, however, an employment contract is utilized by a superintendent and board, outlining terms and conditions of employment. In common and small union free and central school districts these employments contracts may range from one to five years; in larger districts (populations of 4,500 or more), the contact terms may not be less than three, nor greater than five years. In small city school districts, the board may, by resolution, set forth a term of employment not to exceed five years, and enter into a contractual agreement for other terms and conditions of employment. Large cities, those with populations of 250,000 or more, may appoint superintendents for six years, with the exception of Rochester, which is limited by statute to four years.

Contracts range in format from simple paragraphs to elaborate legal documents containing hundreds of agreements, and are typically negotiated between a superintendent and the board (or representatives of each) at the time of initial employment, and at any time the term of employment is extended or modified. Contractual provisions typically address the term and renewal of the agreement, salary and other compensation, health benefits, and evaluation procedures; sick, vacation and other leaves; professional development; and reimbursement of professional expenses.

The "Snapshot" survey addressed each of these issues, and responses are based upon a usable return of 516 questionnaires. Data reported in terms of percent reflect the actual number of completed responses for that particular item, in some cases varying the N somewhat from 516.

The most popular term options for the superintendent's contract are three years (55%) and five years (27%). Five percent (5%) of respondents (N=516) cite a one to two year contract, and slightly over 7% hold a four year contract. These terms acknowledge that a superintendent's leadership is best manifested over a period of several years, and that both parties require some degree of stability to be most productive. A very popular alternative (42% of all respondents) is the rolling or

"evergreen" contract, in which an annual renewal is provided for the full term of the contract. A superintendent holding a three year contract, therefore, would come up for consideration each year for a new three year contract. Failing to achieve such renewal, the superintendent retains the balance of the term of the original agreement. The rolling contract provides the board with an opportunity to translate the annual performance review into a term of employment, and also allows the superintendent a longer period of time to seek alternatives if employment is not to be extended.

Evaluation is a significant and valuable component of the employment agreement, and is typically a formal, written document (87% of all respondents so noted), completed by the board on an annual basis (85%). Perhaps of greatest significance, however, is that 81% of the respondents found the process to be of use in their professional relationship with the board and district.

Earned salary for superintendents in New York State, for the **1993-1994** school year, ranged about a mean of **$93,612**. This figure excludes additional compensation, or earned benefits, and is summarized in the table that follows.

Table 3

Earned Salary 1993 — 1994

Up to $69,000	15.6%
$70,000 — 79,000	21.0%
$80,000 — 89,000	20.8%
$90,000 — 99,000	13.3%
$100,000 — 109,000	10.7%
$110,000 and greater	18.6%

Nineteen percent (19%) of responding superintendents (N-512) earned more than $110,000 in 1993-1994; 16% earned less than $70,000. Typically, salary is closely correlated with district enrollment and longevity in the district, and it should be noted that New York State has a well-known disparity in income as a function of geographic location.

Compensation is offered to superintendents in a variety of media other than salary. Nearly all superintendents are compensated for their professional travel. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of responses (N=516) indicate that a vehicle is provided for the superintendent's use, at district expense. Of those responses remaining, 72% of superintendents are reimbursed for travel expenses through mileage calculations, and an additional 26% receive lump sum payments to reimburse travel expenses.

As would be expected, contracts are near universal in their provision of vacation, sick, and personal leave. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of superintendents receive at least twenty vacation days per year, and nearly half receive more than twenty-one days. Similarly, sick days are provided in nearly all contracts, with 62% of the responding superintendents receiving between eleven and fifteen days per year; 25% receive between 16% and 20%; and 9% receive more than twenty sick days per year. Just over half of the respondents are allowed to accumulate up to two hundred sick days, with 34% reporting no limit to their accumulation.

Given the often transient nature of the chief school officer, over a third of the respondents indicated that they were permitted to transfer accumulated sick leave from their previous district.

Contracts are more frugal with the accumulation of unused vacation time, as nearly half the responses indicate a maximum accumulation of twenty days. Nearly a third, however, report either accumulation limits over thirty days, or no limit at all. Accumulations of vacation days are often discouraged, for as commonly noted in the literature, productivity can actually be increased by the superintendent availing himself or herself of appropriate vacation time.

Similarly, an interest in the wellness of the superintendent is reflected in the number of contracts which call for annual medical examinations at district expense. Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents report that an annual physical examination is called for in their contract. Of those, 98% are offered at district expense, and 75% call for the examination to be conducted annually.

Other common benefits include personal leave, with three days per year cited as the most common option (65%); although some contracts (6%) provide for seven or more personal days per year. Twenty percent (20%) of those responding indicated that their contract provides for payment of graduate tuition, most commonly at the doctoral level, and nearly half of the contracts have some provision for terminal leave pay. Of the 45% indicating a terminal leave provision, the vast majority reported that said leave was to be calculated on the basis of unused sick (68%) and vacation (75%) time. To a lesser extent, payments were to be based upon years of service (9%) or in the form of a retirement incentive (12%).

Professional obligations seem to be recognized by boards of education in the form of payment for dues and memberships in professional organizations, and payment of expenses associated with attendance at professional conferences. It bodes well for NYSCOSS that 99% of respondents (N=493) have their membership fee paid by the district; and that 99% (N=483) are fully reimbursed for attendance at NYSCOSS conferences. Similar responses, although at slightly lower levels, are reported for national and local affiliation.

Health and life insurance coverage is typically specified as a benefit of employment. Nearly all (98.9%) of respondents are afforded family health insurance, with 53% fully paid by the district, and an additional 21% citing a co-pay no greater than 10%. Family dental coverage is provided for 81% of the respondents (N=423). Co-pay requirements are similarly distributed. Eighty-six percent (86%) note the provision of prescription drug coverage, the vast majority either fully paid, or at a co-pay of one dollar. Family optical coverage is noted in 41% of the responses (N-320).

Life and disability insurance coverages are very well represented in contractual language, as noted in the table below.

Table 4

Superintendents' Benefits

Benefit	Number	Percent
Term Life Insurance	375	62%
Whole Life Insurance	380	48%
Disability Insurance	348	55%
Deferred Annuity	301	33%

Comparison of current data with that of the 1992 *Snapshot* study yields remarkably consistent patterns in terms of contractual issues. General terms and associated

benefits have not changed significantly in the two year interim between survey instruments. The percentage of rolling contracts has remained nearly identical, as has the pattern of three and five year contracts, including provisions for evaluation, compensation for professional expenditures, and related fringe benefits.

Part III — Retirement

The third section of the 1994 NYSCOSS membership survey contained five items on retirement (#39, 40, 41, 42, 43). Usable data were found for all five items on retirement.

Superintendents were asked to indicate which of four tiers in the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) they belonged to. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the superintendents belong to Tier I, with 10% belonging to Tier II, 9% to Tier III, and 6% to Tier IV.

Tier I and Tier II TRS members are eligible to retire at age 55.

The 1994 results show very little change from data gathered in 1992. Table 5 summarizes the retirement tier data from the 1992 and 1994 survey.

Table 5
Distribution of Retirement Tiers

Tier	1992	1994
I	76%	75%
II	9%	10%
III	7%	9%
IV	5%	6%

The largest percentage of superintendents indicate that they plan to retire at age 55 (22%), and by age 60, 67% plan to be retired.

Data collected on the year that superintendents' plans to retire show that by the year 2000 (five years from now), 206 (40%) plan to retire and, by the year 2004 (nine years from now), 341 66% plan to retire.

Data from these three questions show a picture of a large number of superintendents who plan to retire within the next four to nine years and who will be between the ages of fifty-five and sixty at the time of retirement.

When asked what career they would choose if they were starting over, 51% indicated the superintendency and 71% said they would stay in education in some capacity. These figures compare with the 66% who indicated they would stay in education in 1992 and 44% who would choose the superintendency in 1992. This would appear to indicate a high degree of satisfaction with their careers in education.

In a related question, when asked if they would want a son or daughter to be a superintendent, the results were very evenly split with 47% saying yes and 46% saying no.

Part IV — Chiefs on the Issues

The 1994 NYSCOSS membership survey concludes with items seeking superintendents' perceptions on a broad range of educational issues at the local and state levels. Taking the superintendents' "pulse" on issues helps to define what matters for students; to clarify the chief school officers' role and relationships; and to gauge the momentum of school reform. Usable responses will be reported and, in certain instances, informed by graphs.

Two items were included in this section of the questionnaire that did not appear in the original 1992 superintendent survey. In New York State, central, union free, and common school districts require voter approval of school budgets while large and small city school districts as well as BOCES pass budgets by a vote of the Board of Education. When asked "who should have the statutory responsibility for passing the annual school budget?," 70% of the superintendents indicated the elected members of the Board of Education should have the responsibility and only 30% responded the "voters." These results point directly to a preference for elected Board members to approve school budgets rather than the prevailing voter referendum required in the vast majority of New York State school districts.

Since the 1992 *Snapshot* survey, the New York State legislature passed certain Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) "reform" bills. Chief school officers were called on to see if the BOCES reform legislation has had a "positive impact." A mere 20% of the superintendents said "Yes," and the other 80% stated "No." This finding will be reviewed in the summary section.

Gauging superintendents' satisfaction on ten job responsibilities was the purpose of another item in the issues' section. On a five point scale, with one identified as ***satisfying*** and five described as ***frustrating,*** chiefs were asked to rate each major job. Interestingly, the highest level of satisfaction was recorded for BOARD RELATIONS. By combining responses of one or two, 67% of the superintendents viewed BOARD RELATIONS as satisfying. Sixty-six percent (66%) found INSTRUCTION and CURRICULUM to be satisfying. While these were the top two "satisfying" responsibilities, 50% of the respondents gave a one or two rating to such duties as PUBLIC RELATIONS, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, PERSONNEL, FACILITIES, and TRANSPORTATION. At the other end of the spectrum, the most "frustrating" job was clearly FINANCES. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the superintendents gave FINANCES a response of four or five. Receiving more neutral responses were the job responsibilities of LABOR RELATIONS and COMPACT IMPLEMENTATION.

Chief school officers were asked to characterize their Board of Education by checking each of fifteen attributes that applied. Typically, superintendents checked more than one attribute. Results, therefore, are reported by the percentage of superintendents that identified a given Board attribute.

Positive Board of Education attributes were described by superintendents as follows: SUPPORTIVE OF SUPERINTENDENT (78%); STUDENT DIRECTED (75%); WELL-INFORMED (60%); FORWARD-THINKING (56%); and COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE (50%). These findings were similar to those in the 1992 survey. Furthermore, by characterizing their Boards in positive terms, superintendents

provided additional support for the earlier discovery that BOARD RELATIONS were satisfying.

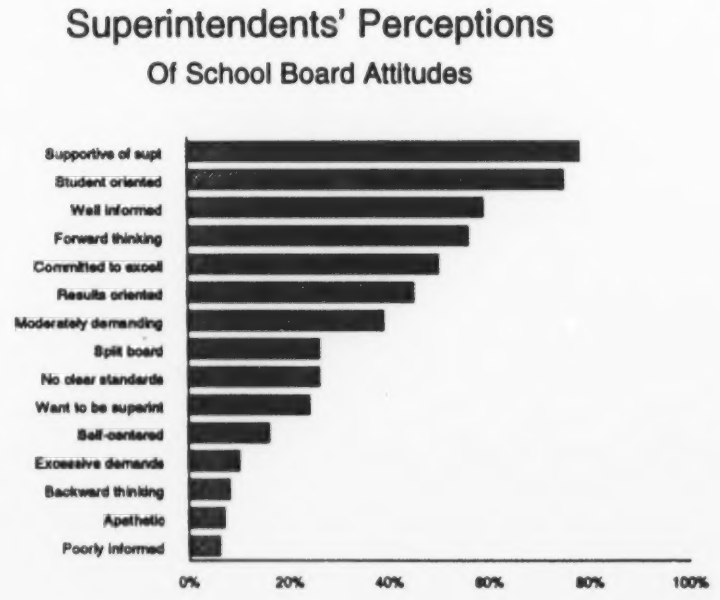
The most negative Board of Education attributes were reported by the fewest superintendents. Sixteen percent (16%) said their Board was SELF-CENTERED; 10% characterized their Board as EXCESSIVELY DEMANDING; 8% noted BACKWARD THINKING; 7% described APATHETIC, and only 6% perceived their Board as POORLY INFORMED. With the top five Board attributes being positive, and given that the least mentioned Board attributes were negative, superintendents' answers on this item quite possibly may be influenced by the "social desirability" of the attributes.

Superintendents found five other school board attributes in the middle range with percentages from 24% to 45%. School board descriptors in the middle range included: RESULTS ORIENTED (45%); MODERATELY DEMANDING (39%); SPLIT BOARD (26%); WITHOUT CLEAR STANDARDS (26%); and WANTING TO BE SUPERINTENDENT (24%). Graph 1 summarizes the findings for this item.

Superintendents frequently remark how "no two days are the same" in the district office. Certainly chief school officers deal with diverse and numerous issues, and they must frequently summon problem-solving skills to be effective. By requesting that superintendents rank their responsibilities according to the "actual and ideal amount of time required," some insight was gained into time management. Results are reported according to the percentage of superintendents that gave each responsibility a rating of one (MOST TIME) in both actual and ideal terms.

Ideally, superintendents would devote their available time and energy to issues directly affecting stu-

Graph 1



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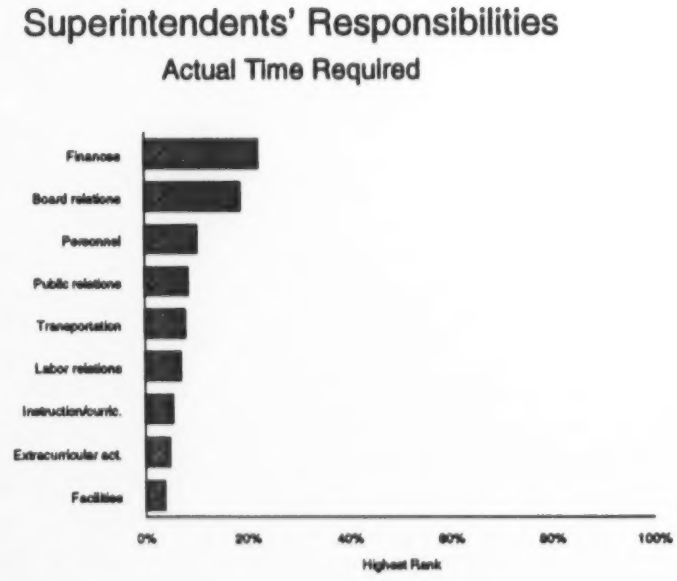
dents, namely instruction and curriculum. Nearly half of the chiefs ranked curriculum and instruction at the top of their ideal list. The exigencies of the post, however, become clear when only 5% of the superintendents gave INSTRUCTION and CURRICULUM as "1" in "actual time spent." Those duties requiring the most "actual" time were FINANCES (22%), BOARD RELATIONS (19%), and PERSONNEL (10%).

Following the earlier finding that finance was "frustrating," only 4% of the superintendents described FINANCES as ideally consuming most of their time. Graphs 2, 3, and 4 chart superintendents' responses to duties according to the actual and ideal amount of time required.

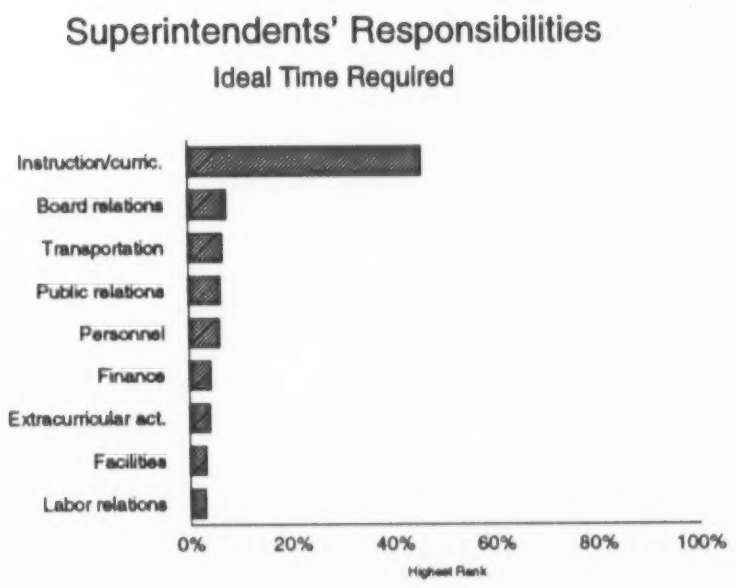
Educational issues abound and sometime compete for attention. Do superintendents find key local issues to be the same or different from the most important state issues? In order to assess perceptions of the main issues, chief executive officers were called on to identify five local and five state issues from a menu of thirty-two options. Those checked off by the highest percentage of school superintendents will be highlighted here.

Close to home, in the local district, chief school officers pinpointed several key issues. Ranking first and second were two related issues. PASSING BUDGETS/BOND REFERENDA and FINANCING OF SCHOOLS were mentioned on 53% and 48% of the surveys, respectively. NEGOTIATIONS was identified as a key local issue by 45% of the superintendents. Fourth on the list of local concerns was the COMPACT FOR LEARNING (34%). Rounding out the top five, ADMINISTRATIVE/BOARD RELATIONS were cited by 32% of the respondents. Two other local issues, PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING and RESTRUCTURING and RE-

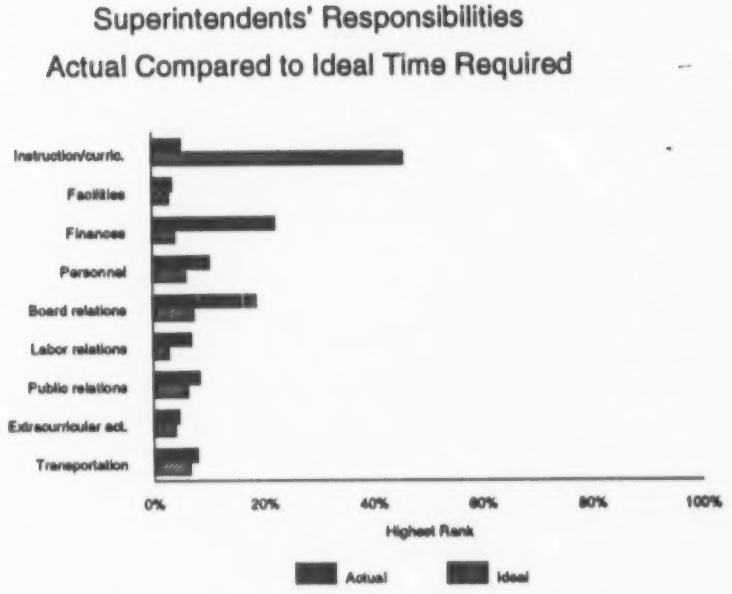
Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4



NEWAL, were mentioned on 28% of the questionnaires. Graph 5 charts these findings. The integration of these issue areas, one with another, is fairly obvious.

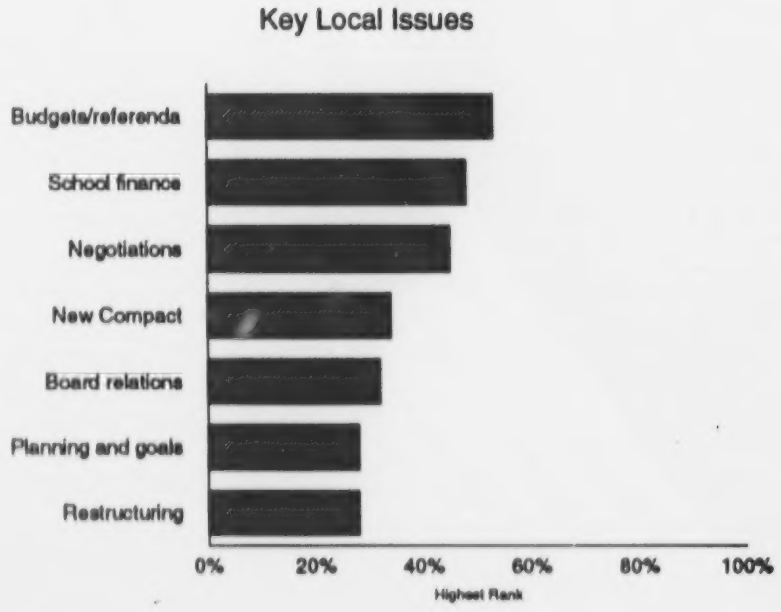
Key state level issues cited by superintendents showed some common elements as well as differences when compared with the local list. By far the most often mentioned state issue was the reform package known as *A New Compact for Learning* (72%). Sixty-five percent (65%) of the chiefs noted FINANCING OF SCHOOLS, thus placing finance in second place on both the state and local issue agenda.

Third on the state issue list was SPECIAL EDUCATION (39%), which did not rise into the top seven issues locally. COMPLIANCE WITH STATE/FEDERAL RECORD-KEEPING REQUIREMENTS and PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN EDUCATION, items missing among the top local issues, were identified on 36% and 32% of the surveys. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the superintendents placed RESTRUCTURING/RENEWAL and ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES on their roster of key state issues. These results are found in Graph 6 on page 12.

Certain state and local issues that often receive attention in the national print and electronic media gained scant mention in the survey of New York State superintendents. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, SCHOOL CHOICE, USE OF DRUGS/ALCOHOL IN SCHOOL, STUDENT HEALTH CONCERNS, and BIAS/RACE RELATED INCIDENTS were checked on 3% or less of the surveys for either the local or state list of key issues.

Reform opportunities are promoted by superintendents through an array of leadership styles. In order to tap the chiefs' perspectives on some aspects of educational reform, they were asked to rate ten such compo-

Graph 5



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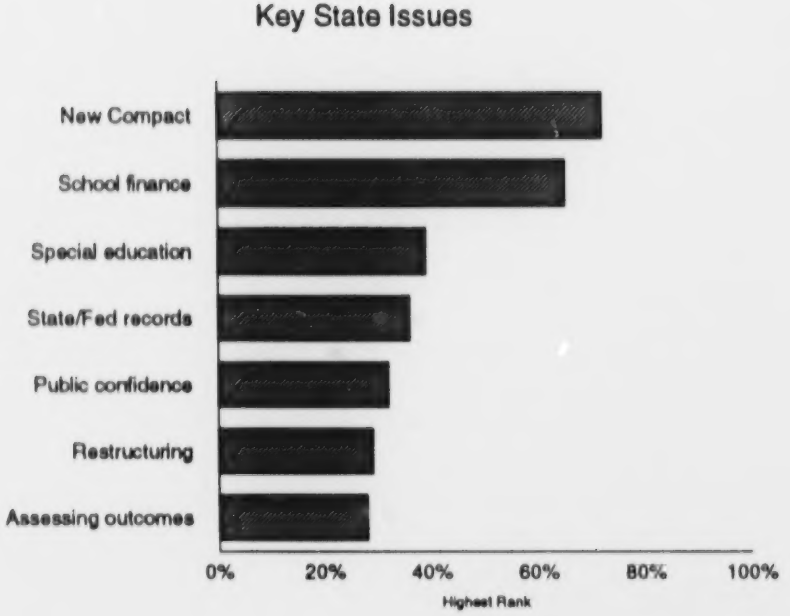
Graph 6

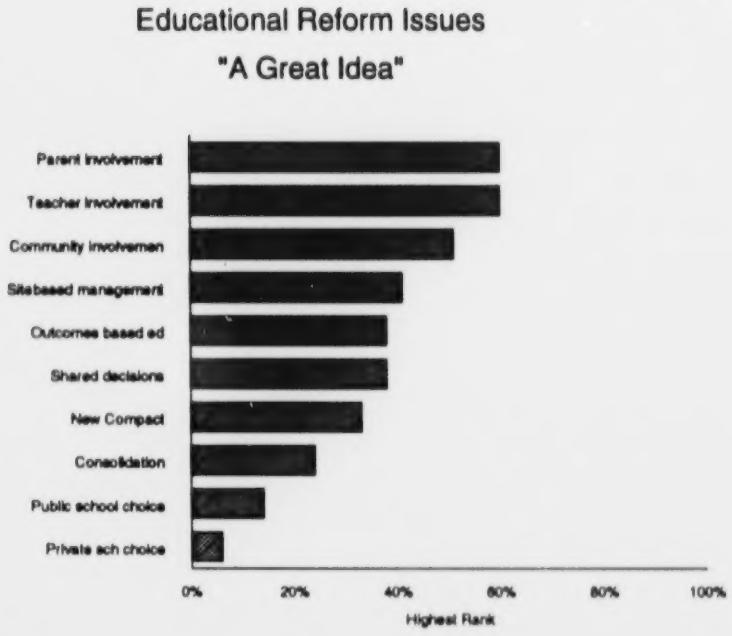


nents as a "Great Idea" (number 1) or a "Poor Idea" (number 3). Giving a value of two was judged to be neutral. The percentage of superintendents that viewed a reform component as "Great" or "Poor" will be described below.

Three educational reform features were at top of the superintendents' scale of "Great Ideas:" TEACHER INVOLVEMENT (61%); PARENT INVOLVEMENT (61%); and COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (52%). For several years now, as *A New Compact for Learning* has gone forward, the involvement of teachers, parents, and community residents has developed momentum. On the opposite end of the scale, chiefs rated, PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE (77%) and PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE (58%) as "Poor Ideas." Such results make sense in light of superintendents' commitment to a public education tradition and the loyalty attached to their respective local school systems. In the middle range of "Great Ideas" were such reform components as SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT (42%), OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION (39%), SHARED DECISION-MAKING, and COMPACT FOR LEARNING (34%). CONSOLIDATION, or the merger of two school districts, was characterized as a "Great Idea" by 25% of the superintendents and as a "Poor Idea" by another 25%. Graph 7 summarizes these finds on page 13.

The next section of the study is the *Summary and Conclusions*. Based on the superintendent survey data, the major findings will be analyzed and placed in the real world context of public school life in the mid-90's.

Graph 7



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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study followed on the heels of the first comprehensive survey of the NYSCOSS membership in 1992, titled *Snapshot of the Superintendency*. A revised version of the original survey was mailed to superintendents in the spring of 1994. An impressive 68% response rate from superintendents allows us to generalize with confidence to the entire population of superintendents in New York State. As data from both surveys have been intered into a mainframe computer, there is the prospect of completing meaningful comparative and longitudinal research into the superintendency in the Empire State.

One prime finding of the original study was a potential "leadership vacuum" in the ranks of chief school officers. Results from the 1994 survey add weight to the original finding. First, superintendentsas a group have aged. In 1992, the mean age of respondents was 49.7 years; whereas in 1994, the mean age was 51 years. Beyond the "graying" of the superintendency, 40% of the sitting chiefs plan to retire in the next five years and 66% intend to retire by the year 2004. Given the pressures of the post, a higher percentage will retire for reasons other than professional choice. To assure that the leadership vacuum does not translate into a quality void, gifted, younger educators need to be encouraged, supported, and promoted into responsible administrative positions, especially the principalship. Boards of education need to consider salary incentives to attract talented administrators from a teaching corps that has made significant income gains while retaining the customary ten month work year. NYSCOSS has established successful forums for aspiring administrators and promising leaders nominated by their superintendents.

Diversity in the leadership pool is another recruitment need. Although more women have been appointed to the superintendency since 1992, chief school officers remain predominately white men. As suggested earlier, the path to the superintendency begins in the classroom and typically steps through the principalship. In order for more African-American, Hispanic, and women educators to become superintendents, more women and minority candidates must be advanced to building principalships and district office posts. School leadership and diversity are enhanced in the process.

The New York State legislature passed Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) "reform" measures in the past couple of years. The reform legislation was intended to hold BOCES accountable on budget and organizational issues. Eighty percent (80%) of the superintendents described the legislation as not having a positive impact. What does this mean? Superintendents seemed to view the legislation as a nuisance because it called for an extra Board meeting at a very busy time of the academic year. Furthermore, a substantial majority of superintendents appear to have a professional and worthwhile relationship with their regional BOCES. That is, BOCES furnish quality and cost-effective services at the request of local school districts. This conclusion confirms the final report of the Moreland Commission which found BOCES to be performing, by and large, effectively.

As was the case in 1992, superintendents in the 1994 study associate positive attributes such as supportive, student-oriented, and forward-thinking with their Boards of Education. As incumbents, such a finding may

be predictable. One item new to the survey, however, showed chief school officers expressing high levels of satisfaction in their actual working relationships with boards. Such a situation can only operate to the advantage of students, programs, and teachers. To the degree they are able to find the time to focus on instruction and curriculum, superintendents record significant satisfaction levels.

On the opposite end, finances generate frustration and undoubtedly stress for superintendents. In the present political environment, both at the state and national level, school finance continues to be widely debated. For school superintendents, such a charged atmosphere makes budgeting similar to Churchill's description of Russia: "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Add local taxpayer discontent to the mix, and chief school officers are hard-pressed to assure proper funding for student programs.

Superintendents remain engaged in an interesting number and variety of local and state educational issues. *A New Compact for Learning*, New York State's reform agenda, calls for greater participation of professionals and parents in decision-making. The Commissioner of Education has promoted the *Compact* and the Board of Regents has endorsed it fully. The *Compact* appears in the superintendents' top five list of key local and state issues. Thus, there is clearly widespread familiarity and commitment to the tenets of the *Compact*. Implementing the *Compact*, however, is like "putting bullfrogs in a wheelbarrow." That is, as long as the star quarterback has maintained academic eligibility, the teacher's contract is in place, and parents are not packing the boardroom, *Compact* work proceeds in a collaborative, meaningful way. When a hot issue surfaces, though, assuring momentum for participatory decision-making can be difficult. Certainly, survey data strongly support the involvement of teachers, parents, and community members as active players in the educational process.

Special education has moved higher on the list of state issues since the 1992 study. In 1994, 39% of the superintendents cited special education as a key state issue compared to 26% only two years ago. Costs attached to special education programs have to be a major factor in this finding. When budgets are already stretched, superintendents now find mandated special education services to be drawing, perhaps disproportionately, from the full range of educational opportunities available for all public school students. Chief school officers want and expect to provide special education services, but paying for the services poses a real problem. Recent federal and state changes in the legislative branch may have an influence in this area.

The *Snapshot II* study places school superintendents in New York State at the center of substantial change in the educational arena. Children as students deserve a learning experience supported by educators, parents, and community members, along with state government officials. Superintendents lead a complex human enterprise with a combination of knowledge, training, experience, personal skill, and energy as well as with the investment of time. Since effective change requires time, future studies will help to determine the influence of school superintendents in creating greater opportunities for students of all ages.